

**Historic District Commission  
Town Hall, Room 126  
Final Meeting Minutes, January 13, 2015**

**Meeting called to order at 7:30 PM. Attending Kathy Acerbo-Bachmann (KAB), David Foley (DF), David Honn (DH), Pamela Lynn (PL), Ron Regan (RR) David Shoemaker (DS). Mike Gowing as BofS rep.**

**Absent: Anita Rogers (AR)**

**7:30 PM      Citizens' Comments and Questions**

Michaela Moran of 80 School St. shared that the property at 90 School St. recently burned and may already be under agreement with a developer. This parcel is not in a historic district.

KAB inquired whether the ACT and Open Space Committee were aware of the situation.

MM requests that the HDC remain aware of the situation and support whatever future entity might organize to present a plan to the appropriate groups and committees.

MG as a citizen urges the HDC to submit a report for the Town Report.

**7:35 PM      Approved Minutes of December 9, 2014 by Unanimous Consent**

**7:36 PM      Acton Center Traffic Study**

David Shoemaker (DS) recused himself as an abutter.

Cory York and Joe SanClemente from Howard/Stein Hudson Associates, Inc., the consultant chosen to conduct the Acton Center Traffic Study, came at the request of the HDC in anticipation of a public forum January 29, at 7pm in Room 204 of Town Hall intended to present data gathered to date and initiate a discussion of traffic issues.

KAB thanked CY and JS for coming and explained the desire of the HDC

to increase safety while preserving the integrity of the Acton Center Historic District. As Rt. 27 is a state road, alterations will require dealing with the Massachusetts Historic Commission (MHC). In order not to get bogged down, it will also be necessary to recognize that the Acton Town Common is a cemetery. A landscape and design perspective will be very important to consider.

Using both an aerial projection and a map of the historic district DH shared that the main focus of the study will be Main St. and Newtown and Woodbury Rd to Nagog Hill Rd. As Main St. (Rt. 27) will be the main focus, it is crucial to remember that the front yards are actually part of the Common often up to the front doors of the homes.

JS shared the groups which are working with his group on design and landscape.

DH emphasized the HDC view is likely to be less is more.

KAB shared her view that traffic calming measures would be preferable.

The Acton Women's Club is the only semi-public property within Acton Center and at times its events draw considerable parking.

Acton Center is the best preserved of the three historic districts in town and that should be recognized in addition to the fact that it is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

DH mentioned the continuing issue that the Town Hall parking lot is often filled with employees' parking. The lot behind the Fire Dept. could be used by them. Then, as a result, there would likely be greater pedestrian flow from that lot to Town Hall.

RR is concerned about inadvertently creating a stressful place with new lights or additional signs. He noted that the character of the West Acton Center has been changed, and not for the better, by the route changes and extensive signage to accommodate the rail passage.

DF added that EDC has been discussing tying events from the

Arboretum into Acton Center potentially creating both more pedestrian traffic and more need for parking around the side streets and Common. For instance, an event might showcase food vendors.

PL reiterated previous concerns and emphasized the possibility of focusing on slowing the traffic through the area in order to preserve and enhance its historical character. This is not just some cemetery but a very historic area with fallen Minutemen from the initial battle of the Revolution.

KAB shared with JS and CY that her previous experience indicates that during a public forum a traffic light will quickly be suggested but is likely immediately to trigger a negative response from others.

DH suggested that KAB explain the criteria used by HDC in making decisions.

MG emphasized low impact and calming should be the goals. Perhaps creating one or more four way stops would achieve these combined goals.

KAB shared the potential for concern if the proposed changes would be irreversible. A flashing light is reversible for example. HDC would look carefully at any impact on Town Hall.

DF asked about speed humps which he has seen used effectively in Nashua, NH.

PL, MG and DF clarified the concept of a speed hump.

KAB suggested slowing the speed on Main St. to begin with as Clinton, MA has done. She believes Clinton's active enforcement has impacted the behavior of drivers.

Chelmsford Village has used a flashing "Your Speed" to slow traffic and MG indicates that people respect it.

JS suggested that changing posted speed limits is not always easy

DS, as a citizen, asked about what the RFP JS has received includes. Cory York said he would circulate the RFP to the HDC.

KAB suggested that Dean Charter has previously assembled historical pictures of the Common which might be helpful.

JS asked if there have been major changes to the Common over time.

KAB indicated that one of the most important aspects is that it has changed little over time.

#### **8:15 PM      Doug Halley – Sewer Update and Discussion**

DF explained that Doug Halley had met with EDC to discuss the West Acton Center sewer expansion which could generate requests from business owners with regard to structural alterations. This is based on potential expansion of or changes to property use when allowed occupancy and seating limits may be raised following the increase in Sewer capacity to properties.

An earlier water resources plan evaluated both needs and solutions. West Acton Center was designated as a significant needs area recognizing both the area that the buildings take up and the area left for septic systems. With respect to solutions, 2 of 9 areas were identified as possible solutions, specifically the Spencer/Tuttle/Flint Rd. areas and West Acton Center.

The BofS identified goals last spring including both short and long term goals for sewers in West Acton. A high level report to get at the basic parameters needed for a viable project should be done. The twenty-two thousand dollars to create the report means that it would be preliminary.

There would be impacts within the historic area likely short term, not long term. Doug Halley suggested there might be the potential to include more historical structures and noted that the needed roadwork might offer opportunities for improvements from the HDC's perspective. However, the businesses would have fewer waste water concerns long term.

Doug Halley emphasized that there must be a balance between the historical and the viable.

KAB asked whether the advantages/disadvantages of South Acton sewers, specifically the increased density it encouraged, were included in the study being discussed.

DF asked about the percentage capacity currently used and projected 200,000 gallons per day. The capacity was later increased to 299,000. 18,000 gallons per day is now used in West Acton so the usage is currently within limit. If a Laundromat or restaurant located in West Acton, water usage would still be within the existing limit.

DF asked about the lines. It will not go beyond the hill on Mass. Ave. The slope on Central St. limits the length, similarly on Willow St. The housing on Windsor Ave. would likely be covered but not the entire length of the street. The school system will need to decide whether Gates and Douglas should be included.

DH asked about the density of building that could be considered after sewerage. To know the worst case scenario is relevant, a high build out to a low build out.

Doug Halley indicated that it is difficult to anticipate future building but there will be a limit due to the established limits.

DS asked about the timing of this project and how it might go together with zoning changes.

Doug Halley indicated the timing would likely be five to six year allowing time to consider zoning changes. He suggested that greater consideration of the residential/commercial balance would be wise.

MG added that the Sewer Committee is also focusing on Kelly's Corner. If resources are directed toward it first, then there may not be resources for West Acton.

MM as a citizen reiterated her concern about the build out question

previously asked by DH. She also suggested looking at demolition by neglect when HDC looks at potential zoning changes.

**8:47 PM      81 River St. Fence**

The owner has installed a fence without HDC permission. Unfortunately she was unable to get sufficient assistance from the Clerk to make her application in time for this meeting.

**9:00PM      40 School St. Historic Plaque**

PL shared the thoughts of the owners who wished to place the plaque above the front door.

KAB is uncomfortable with placing a plaque on a plaque like element. She would consider placing a date above the white board.

KAB suggested that everyone take a look at the house in consideration of alternate locations for the plaque.

**9:15 PM      Update on Affordable Housing in Historic Districts**

DF shared a summary of the housing production meeting held on Dec. 11<sup>th</sup>. A great deal of the demographic information shared focused on the region of Metro-Boston. Unless the Commonwealth's plan is inaccurate, the region will lose population until 2020 when it may begin to rise. An aging population and low birth rates plus an increase in the poverty level are anticipated to produce a decrease in single family units and an un-met need for smaller occupancy residents.

On the state level there will likely be restrictions on demolitions. The forecasts also expect ambulatory populations.

West Acton does not fit the characterization above. South Acton is the vision of what the state might wish to preserve although the Acton HDC may not wish this approach. It was commented in the public meeting that Acton Center offers few public services and many restrictions that mesh with the housing vision.

The state looked for data from the focus groups which met during the public meeting and produced feedback and solution input.

In conclusion the material presented was essentially only a forecast and request for meeting participant feedback.

MG explained the role of 40B development in closing the gap for affordable housing.

The meeting adjourned at 9:34.

Respectfully submitted,

Pamela Lynn  
HDC Secretary